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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, R

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: UNDERAGE WOULD-BE SUICIDE BOMBER TWINS DISCUSS
THEIR DESCENT INTO EXTREMISM

REF: A. RABAT 1809

[B](#). 2004 RABAT 1301

[C](#). 2004 RABAT 2171

(U) This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#). (SBU) In a front-page interview with Pan Arabic daily Asharq Al Awsat on August 31, the 16-year old would-be suicide bomber twins that King Mohammed pardoned on the occasion of the Revolution of the King and People on August 20 (ref A) discussed the factors that led to their descent into Islamic extremism. The sisters -- Iman and Sana Laghrissi -- were sentenced to 5-year jail terms in January 2004 on charges they belonged to a Rabat terrorist group and volunteered to serve as suicide bombers (ref B). Citing harsh childhood living conditions in which one of the sisters was raped and exploited as a maid and a profound empathy for the suffering of Palestinians as motivations, the twins told Asharq Al Awsat that they began to harbor intense, negative feelings toward Israeli Defense Forces and the United States. "The images of Palestinians being killed in Palestine shocked me," said Sana.

[2](#). (SBU) The 9/11 attacks "pleased" the twins, who followed with interest Al Jazeera's stories on Usama Bin Ladin and, in particular, the network's coverage of Bin Ladin's declaration that America would not enjoy security unless Palestine was liberated. "I saw (President) George Bush as an enemy and felt hatred toward America," explained Sana. Acting on this contempt, Iman twice reportedly called to threaten the U.S. Embassy in Rabat with the message: "Despite all the security measures around the Embassy, it will be destroyed, God willing." At this point, the newspaper indicates, the twins desired to go to Afghanistan to "undergo military training," but did not have the means to make the trip.

[3](#). (SBU) The operational turning point in their free fall reportedly was an encounter with a man named Abdelkader Labsir who introduced them to extremist propaganda and the concept of jihad against the infidels. Some of the materials they read urged believers to take action against "cruel and oppressive Arab leaders who do not govern according to Islamic law," according to Asharq Al Awsat. Exploiting the sisters' naivete, their religious extremist suitors began to involve them in the planning of terrorist operations against the Moroccan parliament and a Rabat supermarket. The twins also reportedly began distributing terrorist tracts and pamphlets in the Rabat metro area.

[4](#). (SBU) The sisters told Asharq Al Awsat that images of the "scattered body parts" of suicide bombers and the sight of wailing widows following the May 16, 2003 attacks in Casablanca jolted them and effectively extinguished their enthusiasm for jihad. The girls ceased distributing their pamphlets, according to Asharq Al Awsat, and began backing away from their new terrorist friends, but too late to avoid arrest by Moroccan security forces for their activities.

[5](#). (SBU) In a related story on August 30, the English-language Morocco Times website carried an interview with the twins' mother, Rachida El Charii, who thanked the King for pardoning her daughters. Illiterate and without a television, Charii said she did not learn about her daughters' release until neighbors informed her. Charii, whose husband reportedly left her when the girls were just two months old, blamed her daughters' terrorist activities on a tough life of extreme poverty. She denied having any knowledge about the terrorist group that lured her daughters, but said that one day a "bearded man" came to her house and asked for her daughter's hand in marriage. Charii refused and did not hear from the man again until it emerged later that it was he who had recruited her daughters into the terrorist group.

[6](#). (SBU) COMMENT: The story of the twins' fall into religious extremism is a tragic one, but the prospect of their reintegration into society following the King's amnesty offers hope. The central role that images of injustices against Palestinians played in framing the sisters'

anti-American views is a common theme among Moroccan young people. The dramatic impact that the Casablanca bombings of May 16, 2003 had on changing the young girls' opinions of terrorism also echoes other reports and our own focus group interviews in 2004 (ref C). END COMMENT.
RILEY